

# *Upward and Onward*

*Blind and Deaf Services  
has been across the state  
listening to clients and  
charting a course for the future*

*May 2017*



Georgia Visual and  
Rehabilitation Association



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The cast and crew of “A Role Defined” returned to Roosevelt Warm Springs April 29th to film the final scenes of the drama/mystery movie set in the small town of Shiloh, Georgia. Writer, producer and director Charles Copeland utilized the RWS campus last fall for a number of scenes in the film. At that time, several RWS students participated in the filming as extras. Copeland will complete the editing of the film in the next few months and plans to hold a screening of the movie trailer and selected scenes at RWS sometime in the near future. Here, Copeland (in orange cap) reviews the video of a scene with other members of the cast and crew in the Roosevelt Hall atrium.



# *Blind and Deaf Listening Sessions Statewide*

## GVRA Staff Gains Insight from the Populations They Serve

Blind and Deaf Services Director Denine Woodson as well as other support staff recently traveled across the state in a series of listening sessions aimed at continuing a dialogue with the communities the organization serves.

“The opportunity to meet with the community impacted by GVRA’s services to the Deaf, Blind and DeafBlind has been phenomenal. The testimonials, input and concerns shared by individuals impacted by our services at times, moved me to tears,” Denine said. “The commitment of our staff, providers and stakeholders is stronger than ever, and their efforts to continue to serve during these changing times are highly commendable. Although there is much work to be done, I am deeply encouraged by the commitment of those who serve.”

The whirlwind tour started in Savannah and from there went to Valdosta, Columbus, Rome, Macon, Athens, Atlanta and Augusta.

Each session included a two-hour period focusing on blind and low vision services and then another two-hour period focusing on deaf and hard of hearing services.

On the whole, Denine said, she learned a lot listening to the community at large and will begin to implement some of the suggestions in the coming months.

Denine, who started in her current role several months ago, told each group that what qualifies her for her position is not only her extensive background in vocational rehabilitation but also her commitment to the clients the organization serves.

“You don’t need a savior. You need a platform, a voice in the decisions that are made to exact change in GVRA. Your coordinators, Paul Raymond, Rebecca Cowan-Story and Jared Patton, represent you well and are excellent advocates. The challenge is great, and there is a great deal of work to be done. We are committed to doing it.”

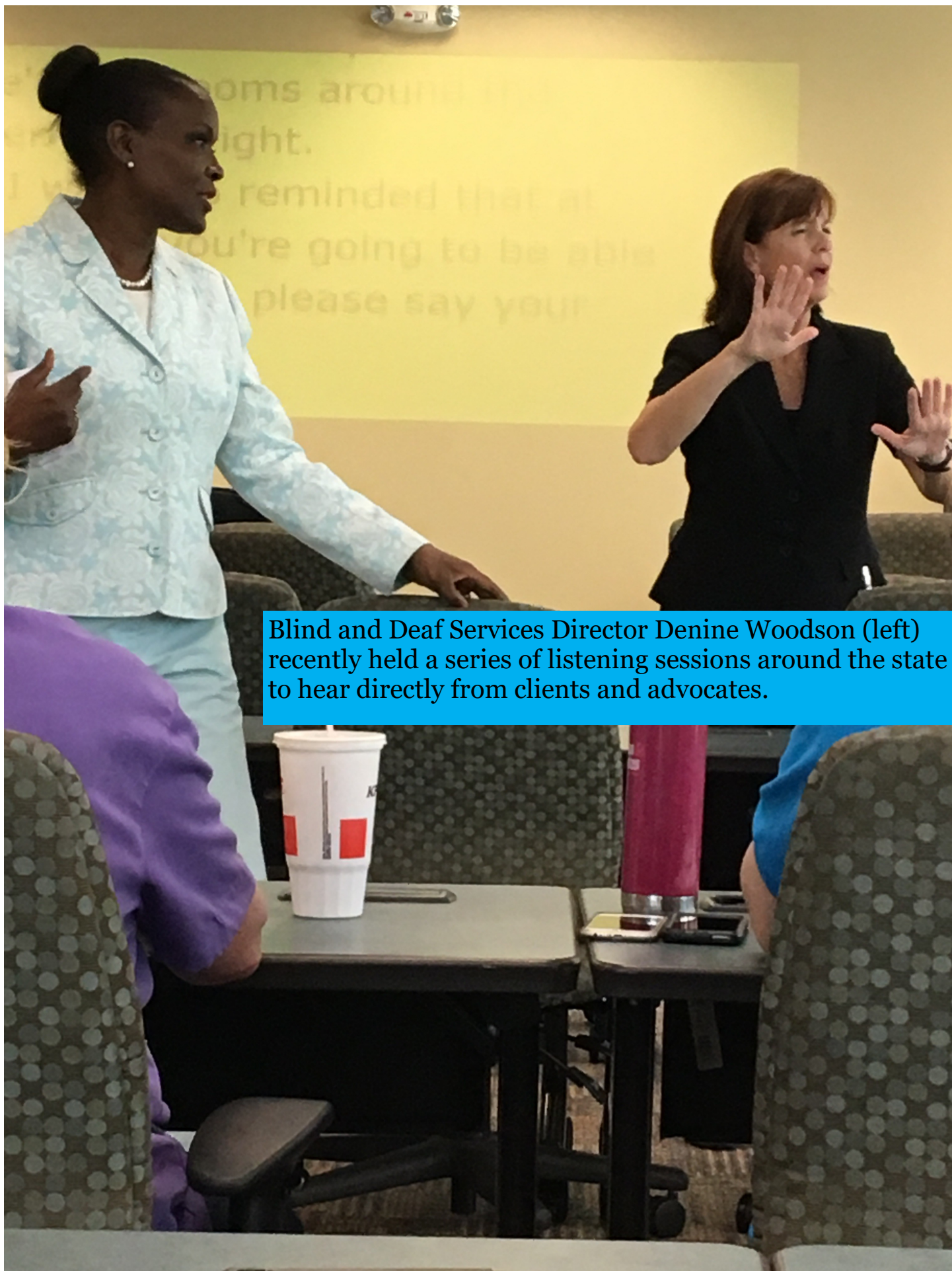


GVRA employees and advocates were recently at a blind and deaf listening session at the Center for the Visually Impaired.

Pictured from left to right back row, then left to right front row:

Doug Burasco, Jared Patton, Stacey Gardenhire (Georgia Advocacy Office), Denine Woodson, Kevin Harris, Adam Hinchliffe, Frania Franch, Tracy Bumgarner, (Front Row) Gigi Taylor, Kelly Stockdale, Debbie Slaton, Bernadette Amerein, Robin Folsom





Blind and Deaf Services Director Denine Woodson (left) recently held a series of listening sessions around the state to hear directly from clients and advocates.





The Augusta High School High Tech program recently celebrated their bi-annual graduation, featuring hundreds of students from around the area. The event was capped off by the awarding of several laptops for some lucky winners.





# Proposed Policy Changes

*The State Rehabilitation Council will be hosting a series of public hearings on proposed policy changes (the complete schedule follows). Here's a brief rundown of those proposed changes in easy-to-digest bullet points.*

- \* New policy format will “go live” on July 1, 2017

- \* Procedural processes have been removed from policy to allow for changes to be made as needed to ensure service delivery is not impeded by procedural practices vs what is policy

- \* WIOA requirements are being integrated throughout the manual

- \* New definition for Competitive Integrated Employment

- \* Requirements for those under 24 to be considered a family of 1 have been revised

- \* Removal of Extended Evaluation in favor of increased use of Trial Work Experiences

- \* Post-employment support services for those receiving Supported Employment have been extended from 18 to 24 months

- \* Addition of Transition specific policy Technical Assistance Briefs will be added to the new Client Services Policy Manual effective July 1, 2017

## **The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Act), as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA):**

- \* Emphasizes the provision of services to students and youth with disabilities to ensure they have opportunities to receive the training and other services necessary to achieve competitive integrated employment

- \* Expands the population of students with disabilities who may receive services and the kinds of services that the VR agencies may provide to youth and students with disabilities who are transitioning from school to

postsecondary education and employment

- \* Increases opportunities to practice and improve workplace skills, such as through internships and other work-based learning opportunities

- \* Requires VR agencies to reserve and expend not less than 15 percent of the Federal VR allotment to provide, or arrange for the provision of, pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities transitioning from school to postsecondary education programs and employment

- \* Requires VR agencies to coordinate the provision of pre-employment transition services with local educational agencies (LEAs).

## **A student with a disability is an individual who:**

- \* Is in an educational program

- \* Is aged 14 up to 22 years of age

- \* Is eligible for and receiving special education or related services under IDEA

- \* Is an individual with a disability for purposes of section 504 of the Act

## **A youth with a disability is:**

- \* An individual with a disability

- \* Not younger than 14 years of age

- \* Not older than 24 years of age

- \* There is no requirement that a “youth with a disability” be participating in an educational program

*Continued on Page 14*

# *Upcoming SRC Public Hearings*

## **May 15 - Dalton**

10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Mack Gaston Community Center

218 N. Fredrick St, Dalton, GA 30721

(706) 278-8205

## **May 16 - Atlanta**

12 p.m. - 2 p.m.

Georgia State University, Urban Life Room 201

140 Decatur St., SE., Atlanta, GA 30303

## **May 17 - Athens**

1:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Athens Office

Oconee and Oglethorpe room

150 Evelyn C. Neely Dr.

Athens, GA 30601

(706) 583-2550

## **May 18 - Macon**

4 p.m. - 6 p.m.

Disability Connections – Center for Independent Living

107 College Street

Macon, GA 31206

Voice: 478-741-1425, Toll Free TTY/Voice: 800-743-2117, FAX: 478-755-1571

## **May 19 - Savannah**

11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Savannah Civic Center, Room TBA

301 W. Oglethorpe Ave., Savannah, GA 31402

(912) 651-6550

## **May 22 - Columbus**

11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Columbus Public Library, CB&T Room (Side B)

3000 Macon Rd., Columbus, GA 31906

(706) 243-2669

## **May 23 - Albany**

2:00 p.m. - 4 p.m.

Albany Resource Center, Community Room

2200 Stuart Ave., Albany, GA

(229) 888-6852

## **May 24 - Valdosta**

1:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.

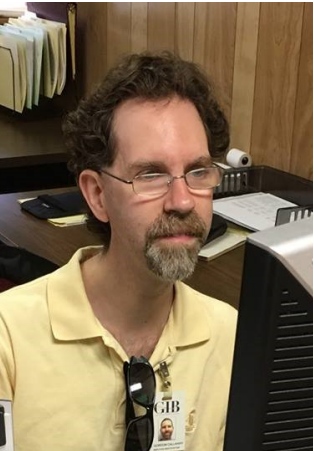
Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Valdosta Unit - Lowndes/Cook/Brooks Room

221 South Ashley St., Valdosta, GA 31601

(229) 333-5211



# *GIB Employee of the Month*



Gordon Calloway was recently recognized as Georgia Industries for the Blind (GIB) employee of the month for April 2017.

Gordon moved to Bainbridge in November 2013 to begin working as a file folder assembler.

Since then, he has been promoted to plant receptionist and also performs duties in GIB's call center.

Originally from Suwannee, he attended Truett-McConnell and Shorter College, receiving an Associates Degree in Theology and a BA in Religion and Philosophy respectively. Gordon and his wife Christie have two cats, Felix and Tux.

The family resides in Bainbridge, where they are members of the First Baptist Church.

Gordon's hobbies include vegetable gardening, cultivating squash, eggplant and a variety of other vegetables.

Congratulations, Gordon, and thank you for a job well done.

# *Employee of the Quarter at RWS*



Megan Hunt, Program Assistant in the vocational assessment services department, has been recognized as the Employee of the Quarter at Roosevelt Warm Springs. Megan has worked at Roosevelt Warm Springs since 2014. She started in the Georgia Hall Information Center, but transferred to Vocational Assessment Services in November 2016. May first marked her first day as a full-time employee of RWS.

# *RWS' Peggy Chapman Retires*

Academic Education Instructor Peggy Chapman retired from Roosevelt Warm Springs at the end of March after 25 years of service to the students of the historic vocational rehabilitation center.

Overall, she has spent 40 years teaching young people in the Meriwether County area.

In the accompanying picture, Peggy (right), receives a photograph of Georgia Hall from RWS Director of Residential Services Lee Brinkley Bryan.



# *Veg Out at RWS*

## Partnerships Lead to Opening of New High Tunnel

Roosevelt Warm Springs (RWS) recently celebrated the ribbon cutting on a new high tunnel, allowing students the opportunity to grow vegetables on campus for the first time.

The tunnel comes as a result of a strategic partnership from Two Rivers Power, Georgia Power and the Roosevelt Warm Springs Development Fund, all of which donated significant amounts to get the project off the ground. This was also made possible by RWS maintenance staff who cleared and leveled the land where the tunnel is housed.

“This will give our students opportunities they wouldn’t normally have,” said Debbie Turner, horticulture instructor at RWS. “In rural Georgia, there’s a lot of agricultural jobs, and we want our students to be able to meet the demands of those jobs.”

No matter where the students call home, there will always be a garden center or a landscaping company hiring, and they’ll have work-ready skills when they leave RWS.

For the uninitiated, a high tunnel is an unheated, plastic covered structure—similar to a traditional greenhouse—that provides

more environmental control than open air planting. Because of this, high tunnels effectively extend both the planting and harvesting season to include cooler months. It’s also referred to as a polytunnel, a polyhouse, hoop greenhouse or hoophouse.

Lane Duncan, a former student at the Cave Spring Center before transferring to RWS, said that he has already learned a lot from the addition of the tunnel.

“I started working in horticulture here because I wanted to learn all the things I could in that area,” he said. “I’m having a great time, and I’m learning a lot of things. I’m learning how to use the equipment, and I’m getting pretty good at it.”

While the official ribbon cutting was in early May, the tunnel has already been in use, with lettuce, tomatoes, peppers ... basically everything you need for a salad except the dressing. They’re anticipating their first harvest in mid summer.







**Students at RWS show  
off their hard work at  
their new high tunnel.**





Executive Director Sean Casey recently spoke at an employer recognition event at KSU. His speech follows on the next page.



# Employer Recognition at KSU

*GVRA Executive Director Sean Casey recently spoke at an employer recognition ceremony as hosted by Kennesaw State University's Academy of Inclusive Learning. Below are his remarks. They have been lightly edited.*

Thank you all for having me here today. It's an honor and a privilege to be able to speak at this year's Employer Appreciation Reception.

Kennesaw State is a tremendous partner, and its Academy for Inclusive Learning continues to produce young adults who are ready to contribute to the workforce and society as a whole, so thank you all for what you do. I'd like to start by taking the time to recognize several people in the audience.

Thank you to Dr. Ibrahim Elsayy, Associate Professor and Executive Director of the Academy for Inclusive Learning and Social Growth; Dr. Ken Harmon, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Kennesaw State and Dr. Mark Tillman, Dean of the WellStar College of Health and Human Services Faculty, staff and all the intern supervisors who are in attendance.

Also, I want to thank all the employers who recognize the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities. Without you, we could not succeed. Study after study has shown that hiring people with disabilities is good for business, and I'm glad you all recognize that. I'll be touching on our ramped-up outreach effort to the business community in a little bit. Again, thank you.

As Karla said, my name is Sean Casey, and I'm the Executive Director of the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency. For those who don't know, our organization is composed of five different programs. Vocational Rehabilitation, Roosevelt Warm Springs and Cave Spring Center, the Business Enterprise Program, Georgia Industries for the Blind and Disability Adjudication Services.

For the uninitiated, let me briefly breakdown what all of these programs do.

**Vocational Rehabilitation:** VR is very much the cornerstone of what we do. No matter where in the state a person is, they can go to a VR office, and a counselor will work with them to figure out what they need to succeed in beginning or returning to a career.

**Roosevelt Warm Springs and Cave Spring Center:** Both RWS and CSC are residential campuses that not only teach our clients independent living skills but also provide numerous certification opportunities—in innovative fields like robotics and 3D printing—that can lead to good paying job when they graduate.

**Business Enterprise Program:** BEP helps train and certify blind vendors to run food service sites at locations across the state, including snack bars, cafeterias and rest stop vending centers along the interstate.

**Georgia Industries for the Blind:** GIB operates several manufacturing facilities—the biggest is in Bainbridge—that by mandate maintains a staff ratio of 75 percent of individuals who are blind or low vision. They produce a wide variety of things including pillows, office supplies and all the safety vests you see on the HERO units who help motorists in and around Metro Atlanta.

**Disability Adjudication Services:** DAS makes Social Security disability determinations under an agreement with the Social Security Administration. DAS is fully federally funded.

A big part of why we're here is because GVRA supports KSU in what they're doing here.

Since we began this partnership in 2014, the graduates of the academy have gone on and done some very special things, ultimately having the life that I pray my own children have. Nearly 90 percent of graduates are now

employed or are seeking an advanced degree. That's huge.

And that kind of success wouldn't be possible without the buy in and partnership of everyone in this room. For that, I want to say thank you.

I also want to commit today that GVRA will continue to provide whatever support you all need to continue the successes you've already achieved. Because in the end, our mission is the same. We both want individuals with disabilities to be able to live and work and progress towards whatever goals they have.

Now I want to talk a little bit about where GVRA is going as an organization.

After listening to our customers and hearing where they thought we should be headed, we made the decision to hire Denine Woodson as our Director of Deaf and Blind Services. It's important that we have someone whose full-time job is ensuring the success of our sensory populations, and she's recently been on a whirlwind tour across the state meeting with the community at large and discussing ways in which we can deliver better services, faster.

The reason we're all here today, as I touched on earlier, is to honor the business leaders who have stepped up to the plate and prioritized hiring individuals with disabilities. As an organization, we're in the midst of increasing our outreach effort to the business community, as made possible by our Employment Services Department.

They're working so that—like you—all employers understand that hiring our clients will further their own mission, ensuring that they have a well-trained and prepared workforce to meet their modern business needs. We're excited about sharing this information with the business community, and thus far we've had some major partnerships with employers both big and small.

This is just the beginning, and in the days and months to come, you'll continue to see big things from our organization.

Thank you for allowing the time to speak with you all today. I very much appreciate it.

## *Proposed Policy Changes Continued*

### **Pre-employment transition services are provided to “students with disabilities” who are:**

Eligible for VR services; or Potentially eligible for VR services (i.e. all students with disabilities, including those who have not applied or been determined eligible for VR services)

### **Pre-Employment Transition Services “Required” Activities:**

Job exploration counseling  
Work-based learning experiences, which may include in-school, after school, or community-based opportunities

Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs at IHEs

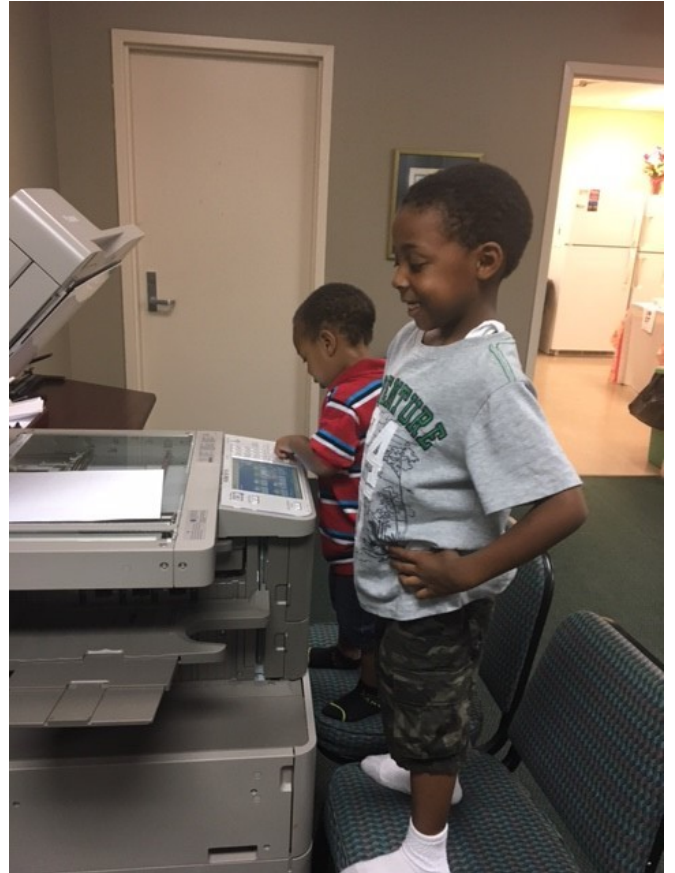
Workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living

Instruction in self-advocacy, including peer mentoring



# Take Your Child to Work Day

April 28 marked Take Your Child to Work Day. Below are some pictures from around the state including Atlanta, Savannah and Stone Mountain DAS.



# Bringing Students Together

By Director of Transition Lauri Tuten

As professionals who serve individuals with disabilities, we are sustained and inspired by the successes of our clients. To assist a person with a disability to employment in their chosen career is truly great work. Because we are so focused on the work we do everyday, we don't always think of the way our clients alter and change people's lives outside of GVRA. Recently we received an email from one of the Inclusive Post-Secondary Education (IPSE) programs for whom GVRA supplies teachers and tuition assistance for eligible clients. The email gave a testimony from one of the graduating seniors who had mentored a student. The email is as follows:

*"I just wanted to share my last day as X's [name was withheld] coach yesterday. I feel more emotional about my role as X's coach coming to an end than I do about graduating. I can't say how thankful I am to*

*have been a part of Excel for my last year at Georgia Tech."*

Take a minute to reflect on how the opportunity for a "typical" student to mentor a student with an intellectual disability has helped both the mentor and the mentee. When this Georgia Tech grad goes out into the world of work, he might be in a position to hire employees, and he will remember the experience and know the capabilities of our clients. The "Friends Helping Friends" Club in Elberton, Georgia and run by our GVRB Board Member, Sandy Adams, is also changing lives by changing mentalities about what students with disabilities can do instead of focusing on what they CAN'T do. Similarly, FHF works by pairing students without disabilities as mentors to students with disabilities.

## Follow Us

Written by Communications Manager John Peyton Boan

Do you like what was in this month's newsletter? It's not the only place you can find success stories, disability information and general GVRA news.

We're also on Facebook and Twitter. You can go to the URLs below to start following us and joining the conversation, because we always want to hear from you. Whether it's a question or concern or just a general comment, feel free to shoot us a line.

As always, let me know if there's ever anything I can do to help you, and if there's anything you'd like to see in upcoming newsletters, I welcome the feedback.

My office door is always open (I have a cubicle).

JPB

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